AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

<u>In the Claims</u>:

Please cancel Claims 19-23, without prejudice, as being directed to non-elected subject matter.

1.   (original) A method of conducting an e-commerce transaction over a communications network, comprising:

(a)   a customer providing payment information to pay for selected goods or services offered by a merchant;

(b)   entering the payment information on an e-commerce site associated with the merchant and that is hosted by a merchant-hosting entity having a permanent payment processing account, and associated account identification information, with a financial processing authority;

(c)   submitting merchant identification information and the payment information to the merchant-hosting entity;

(d)   validating the merchant identification information;

(e)   upon validation, forwarding the payment information and payment processing account identification information to a payment gateway entity;

(f)   the payment gateway entity submitting the payment information and account identification information to the financial processing authority for payment authorization;

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(g)   upon authorization, forwarding authorization data to the merchant-hosting entity via the payment gateway; and

(h)   notifying the merchant of the payment authorization.

2.   (original) The method of claim 1, wherein a permanent payment processing account associated with the merchant is not used in connection with the transaction.

3.   (original) The method of claim 1, wherein the payment information includes account information from at least one established electronic payment vehicle and a purchase amount.

4.   (original) The method of claim 3, wherein the at least one established electronic payment vehicle is one of a credit card, a debit card, purchase card, virtual check and smart card.

5.   (original) The method of claim 1, further including the step of the customer selecting the goods or services for purchase at the merchant's e-commerce site prior to step (a).

6.   (original) The method of step 1, wherein step (b) further includes submitting customer identification data to the merchant-hosting entity.

7.   (original) The method of step 6, wherein the customer identification data comprises a customer name and delivery information.

8.   (original) The method of claim 1, wherein the merchant-hosting entity is capable of hosting a plurality of different merchant sites.

9.   (original) The method of claim 1, wherein the merchant and the merchant-hosting entity are separate entities.

10. (original) The method of claim 1, wherein the merchant's e-commerce site is a website.

11. (original) The method of claim 1, wherein the merchant's e-commerce site is accessible telephonically.

12. (original) The method of claim 1, further including the step of notifying the customer of the authorization of the transaction.

13. (original) The method of claim 1, further including the step of settling the transaction.

14. (original) An e-commerce transaction system for processing payment for goods or services offered by a merchant and selected for purchase by a customer using an established electronic payment vehicle, and without resort to a permanent payment processing account associated with the merchant, the system comprising:

(a) a communications network;

(b) a merchant-hosting entity computer system connected to the network and associated with a permanent merchant payment processing account, the merchant-hosting entity computer system including

a server that hosts a merchant-hosting entity site and a merchant e-commerce site whereat payment information from the established electronic payment vehicle may be entered to pay for the selected goods or services,

a database containing a table for storing merchant identification data, customer identification data, and the payment information, and

an application program interface wrapper that integrates the merchant's e-commerce site with the merchant-hosting entity site;

(c)   an electronic payment gateway computer system connected to the network and in communication with the merchant-hosting entity computer system, that stores the merchant identification data; and

(d)   an electronic payment processing authority computer system in communication with the payment gateway computer system that authorizes the customer payment for the selected goods or services.

15.   (original) The e-commerce transaction system of claim 14, wherein the established electronic payment vehicle is a credit card.

16.   (original) The e-commerce transaction system of claim 14, wherein the merchant-hosting entity server host a plurality of merchant sites.

17.   (original) The e-commerce transaction system of claim 14, wherein the merchant's e-commerce site is a website.

18.   (original) The e-commerce transaction system of claim 14, wherein the merchant's e-commerce site is accessible telephonically.

19-23. Canceled.